

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 5, Sec 1.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE
24 March 1983

Nicaragua claims it beat rebel attackers

SAN RAMON, Nicaragua [UPI] — Sandinista militia commanders said Wednesday that they had routed rebel invaders in fighting for the town of San Ramon but that skirmishes were believed to be underway around two other towns in northeastern Nicaragua.

Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Tinoco expressed his leftist government's concern that the "massive infiltration" of 2,000 rightist rebels into Nicaragua was a prelude to an attack by Honduras.

Tinoco's comments in New York came only hours after Nicaragua charged that Honduran soldiers had fired mortars and machine guns into its territory in support of what it called a U.S.-sponsored invasion.

The United Nations Security Council was holding closed-door consultations to decide on a possible emergency meeting Wednesday at the request of the Nicaraguan government.

TRUCKS CARRYING 350 troops arrived Tuesday in Matagalpa province, one of the centers of fighting between Sandinista troops and the rightists allegedly receiving U.S. support.

In San Ramon, 60 miles northeast of Managua, members of the Sandinista militia said they and army soldiers had beaten the guerrillas in fighting during the past week.

One militia leader said the rightists never posed a threat to San Ramon despite rebel radio reports that the insurgents had seized the mountain town. But the militiamen said fighting apparently was underway to the east near the town of Rio Blanco and possibly south near San Dionisio.

The incursion by the rightists into Matagalpa was the deepest penetra-

tion by the rebels since they began sporadic attacks from Honduras against the Sandinistas three years ago, authorities said.

BUT ONE REBEL leader said a new front would soon open.

"There is an understanding between the forces in the north and in the south that the operation would continue," said Fernando Chamorro, a leader of the Honduran-based Nicaraguan Democratic Front, on the clandestine rebel radio "15 de Septiembre."

In a protest note, the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry accused Honduran troops of firing mortars and machine guns Sunday on positions inside Nicaragua. The note said the Nicaraguans held their fire and there were no casualties.

Honduras issued no immediate response to the note.

IN AN INTERVIEW on NBC's Today show, Tinoco cited the attack as one indication that Hondurans may be planning a larger military action to support the rebels.

"There are about 2,000 men inside the country," he said. "They do not represent a military threat. The problem is they could represent a secondary thing from a bigger action against Nicaragua."

Managua announced the nationalization Tuesday of food distribution and said martial law may be imposed to help fight the right-wing Nicaraguan exiles mounting a two-pronged offensive inside Nicaragua.

To bolster the claims of U.S. intervention, Managua cites U.S. news reports of a \$19 million CIA operation approved by President Reagan and managed by the U.S. ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, to destabilize Nicaragua.